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SUBJECT: LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS TO GO AHEAD DESPITE
UNRESOLVED ISSUES

REF: A. (A) LAGOS 540

[1](#)B. (B) LAGOS 1210

[1](#)1. SUMMARY: The government of Delta State plans to hold local council elections in Warri November 27 in three areas where elections were suspended March 2004. The majority ethnic group in the area, the Ijaws, have threatened to boycott the elections because they believe the configuration of the local government areas dilutes their voting strength and will result in their under-representation in local government. Due to the possibility of protests and violence surrounding the elections, Post issued a warden message advising Amcits in Warri to avoid unnecessary travel November [1](#)27. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. Barring a last-minute court injunction, the government of Delta State will conduct local council elections November 27 for three areas in Warri: Warri South, Warri North, and Warri Southwest. The Delta State Independent Electoral Commission (DSIEC) will supervise the elections. The state government originally scheduled the elections for March 27, along with elections in the other areas of the state. However, violence between the two major ethnic groups, the Ijaws and the Itsekiris, caused the government to postpone the elections to prevent a further escalation in violence (reftel A).

[1](#)3. Arguing that several issues have not yet been resolved, Ijaws have vowed to boycott the elections. Edwin Clark, a prominent Ijaw chief, told Poloff that two key issues are prompting the boycott: non-participation of the Ijaws in the last voter registration and the allegedly discriminatory demarcation of wards. According to Clark, most voters remain unregistered in five of the ten wards in Warri, and most of these voters are Ijaw. He commented that the government has put soldiers in Warri to maintain the fragile peace, and yet it threatens to disrupt the peace by holding these elections. Clark said the government is "looking for trouble"; the unwillingness of the courts and the government to address the problems is "driving people to action." Clark said he could not predict whether violence would erupt if the elections go ahead. (Comment: What Clark did not say was that Ijaw leaders are in part responsible for the number of unregistered voters. During the last voter registration exercise, Ijaw leaders persuaded their followers to boycott that process as well. End comment.)

[1](#)4. Itsekiris also are displeased with the current ward demarcation and have taken the issue to court. Newspaper reports over the past weeks, however, indicate Itsekiri residents plan to participate in the elections. Isaac Jemide, an Itsekiri leader, advised the Ijaws to follow the Itsekiri example and contest the ward demarcation in court instead of boycotting the elections.

[1](#)5. A newspaper reported that an Ijaw group, the Federated Niger Delta Izon Congress, warned all foreign nationals working on oil installations to leave Warri by noon on November 27 or face possible harm. According to the report, the group plans to take over oil installations in the creek areas. A Chevron contact told Poloff that the threat was not a great cause for concern because few expatriate oil workers remain in Warri; most have already been moved from the area because of the ongoing violence over the past couple years.

[1](#)6. COMMENT: Warri has not yet recovered from the upsurge in violence in March 2003 when more than 100 people were killed and property worth millions of naira was destroyed. The "ceasefire" of June 1, 2004, has brought a period of relative calm to the area (reftel B). The disputes and threats surrounding the planned November 27 elections reveal that tensions remain high and little progress has been made to address underlying issues of the Warri power struggle. END COMMENT
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